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ABSTRACT

This document consists of abstracts for two papers which discussed television audience research and public policy. The first, "News Audience Research and an Informed Electorate" (Mark Levy), examined more than a dozen studies over the past 20 years concerning the flow of news and information to the public. None of these studies found television to be the public's "main source" for news. Thus, it is argued that a non-traditional form of audience research should be undertaken, which focuses on how and what viewers learn from their news exposure, so that journalists can more adequately meet their responsibility of helping to create an informed electorate. The second paper, "Media Research and Public Policy: A Question of Fit" (Philip A. Harding), questioned the extent to which current television research accurately corresponds to the issues raised by policy makers concerned with the possible deleterious effects of television on society. It also noted that only recently has the application of empirical research to these issues become widely accepted by the policy making community, and that with that acceptance comes a heightened responsibility on the part of research practitioners to ensure the "tightness of fit" between the policy questions put to them and the answers they provide. (Author/EW)

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS POLICY RESEARCH CONFERENCE

Audience Research Section

Airlie, Virginia

September 27-30, 1987

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Mark R. Levy: News Audience Research and an Informed Electorate

Television news is widely - and incorrectly - thought to be the public's "main source" for news. This paper presents a review and synthesis of more than a dozen studies, conducted over a twenty year period, which have examined the flow of news and information to the public. In not one of those studies was television found to be the public's "main source" for news. The argument is then advanced that a non-tradition form of audience research which focuses on how and what viewers learn from their news exposure is crucial, if broadcast journalists are to more adequately meet their responsibility of helping create an informed electorate.

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AUDIENCE RESEARCH
Chair: James Webster

Philip A. Harding: Media Research and Public Policy: A Question of Fit

Television, virtually since its arrival in the late 1940's, has been the focus of various concerns as to possible deleterious effects upon the society at large, and particularly upon that society's youngest members. Are there measurable social harms that flow from television viewing - harms that would lead policy-makers in the public sector or the industry itself to consider remedial changes? And, just as importantly, would the proposed changes in fact accomplish in any significant way their intended aim?

The "question of fit" to which the paper's title refers has to do with the degree of correspondence between the issues which policymakers and others have raised about television and the conclusions reached through empirical research. Only relatively recently has the application of research to these issues become widely accepted by the policymaking community. And with that acceptance comes a heightened responsibility on the part of research practitioners to ensure the "tightness of fit" between the policy questions put to them and the answers they provide. The paper suggests some specific steps that hold promise of better accomplishing that critically important aim.

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